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## In Memoriam of Hon. Joseph M. McLaughlin

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## IN MEMORIAM OF HON. JOSEPH M. McLAUGHLIN

*Matthew T. McLaughlin\**

Father McShane; Deans Martin, Treanor, and Feerick; Judge Seibel; Professor Katsoris; loyal sons and daughters of Fordham; family and friends:

This is the third time we have gathered in tribute to my father, our giant who fell in the middle of last year. The tributes have all been so heartfelt, so tender, so witty. We have even had a few accidental splashes of eloquence. Gatherings such as these sanctify his memory, and all of the words uttered in tribute will always be cherished by my family. The greatest tribute offered to my father has not been the words of the judges, the clerks, the deans, not even those of the President of the University. The greatest tribute to my father's memory has been the cascade of affection shown to Joe McLaughlin's loved ones left behind. On behalf of my mother Frances, my brothers, and my sister, please allow me to thank you once again for the immense outpouring of sympathy and respect shown to us.

It is fitting that we offer tonight's tribute to my father in the halls of his beloved Fordham Law School, a place blessed by his presence for twenty years of unstinting devotion as professor and Dean. There is a particularly beautiful verse in Revelations that echoes in our minds tonight. Of the blessed dead, this verse teaches us: "they will rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them."<sup>1</sup>

The works of men of genius do follow them and remain as a lasting treasure. Though there may be dispute about the immortality of the soul, no one can deny the immortality of genius. Everyone associated with Fordham Law is in some way better today by dint of my father's love for the school. My father wished to serve, and he served us all. He had that special grace, that special spirit, that says: "Give me the challenge and I will meet it with joy."<sup>2</sup>

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\* Matthew T. McLaughlin is a partner at Venable LLP and a graduate of Fordham University School of Law. He delivered these remarks as part of a tribute to his father, the Hon. Joseph M. McLaughlin, on February 4, 2014 at Fordham Law School.

1. *Revelation* 14:13 (New Revised Standard).  
2. President Ronald Reagan, Remarks Following the Loss of the Space Shuttle Challenger and Her Crew (Jan. 28, 1986), available at [http://www.nasa.gov/audience/formedia/speeches/reagan\\_challenger.html](http://www.nasa.gov/audience/formedia/speeches/reagan_challenger.html).

My father kept his sense of joy by nurturing Chesterton's advice that angels can fly because they take themselves lightly.<sup>3</sup> Never too full of himself and usually downright irreverent, Joe McLaughlin's humor was keenly on display one particular day in the 1970s. As Dean of the law school, he was completing a questionnaire sent by a bureaucrat pressuring him on the school's hiring policies. Among the questions asked was one particular gem: "How many employees do you have, broken down by sex." You can see the glee in my father's eye as he answers: "Only one. Alcohol is a much more serious problem at Fordham."

In life, there's all kinds of random luck. As one of the four McLaughlin children, my good fortune was to have Joe McLaughlin as my father. I did not do anything to deserve it, but the greatest thing that has ever happened to me is to have been born his son. As I look back on him through eyes still swollen with unshed tears, I see that great teachers make great fathers.

I often look back through the eyes of a ten-year-old boy. The image of my teacher again returns. During most of my childhood, we had a beautiful summer home in Mattituck on the East End of Long Island. My father spent some of his happiest days during those golden Mattituck summers. The house had a fair-sized lawn that ran to a bluff overlooking the Long Island Sound. In my wistful memory, I walk across the lawn from the bluff, salt in my hair, and sand between my toes. As I near the house, my father comes into focus. He looks like he does all the time during the summer. He sits in a lawn chair against a white table under the apple tree about five yards from the house. He is dressed in his standard July uniform: a T-shirt and cut-off blue jeans. As I approach, I see the orange electric cord my father has fed through an open window of the house. The cord powers a radio, which plays classical music, and it also feeds a dictation machine, which many of you will remember as a Dictaphone.

He spots me. He holds up a finger. He needs to finish a thought. Dad sits with the microphone in his hand, held near his mouth, as he shifts papers across the table. He's flipping through the advance sheets of New York Practice opinions. He has torn these out of the paperback reporters over the last year. This is the image I saw summer after summer. My father sitting under the apple tree dictating all day for six weeks as he completed that year's McKinney's Commentaries. It was hard, focused work, and he loved it.

There I sit, silently watching him dictate to some stranger who is not present. I didn't have to sit there, but I wanted to. Joe McLaughlin had a magnetism, a personality, a spark, something magic, that just made him fun to watch. And he spoke in those full, robust, well-constructed sentences with his clear, crisp diction. Diction that we miss now. I heard strange tales about a Dead Man Statute, and about some scary person named "Long Arm Jurisdiction." The sorts of people with whom my father wanted to have "minimum contacts."

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3. See G.K. CHESTERTON, *ORTHODOXY* 113 (1908).

What made him so magnetic? I think it is that he was content. He was a guy completely comfortable in his skin. He sometimes held himself out as a marble bust, but anyone who spent two minutes with Joe McLaughlin knew he was all flesh and blood. Inconsistent? Perhaps. But, he was a man large enough to admit inconsistency. He knew who he was, and he knew where he was from. There was nothing phony about Joe McLaughlin. He was a gentleman scholar content to sit dictating under an apple tree for six weeks. The private man was content to work in T-shirt and cut-off blue jeans and wearing really ugly open-toed leather sandals. I once called this footwear his “Jesus sandals.” He tossed his head back, smiled, and he said: “I don’t need these to walk on water.” I think he was kidding.

And then his work would end. No longer was he the craftsman, the philosopher, the shaman—he was just Dad. He would click the microphone to “off,” move the rock paperweights around the table, and he was then—as they say in the East—“fully present” as he spoke to me.

At the funeral mass in August, my sister Mary Jo told you that the greatest gift a parent gives his child is time spent together. Time will never efface the memories I hold in my heart of the hours spent talking to my father. I will die content if my children can boast of the kind of keepsake memories that I have of talks with my father. We covered everything: from why people do not fall off the earth in Antarctica; to the myth of Damon and Pythias; to why a zither is not just called a harp.

But what he really wanted to do was laugh and to make me laugh. And that he did: in gales and peals and giggles and cackles. He taught it as a moral imperative not to take oneself too seriously. Laughter was his invincible weapon against the haughty world. To his end, he held this sharp tool close and no matter how serious or grim the world might get, he saw the comic strip that we are all in. And he taught us to laugh at it.

He laughed. He stayed content. He kept to simple pleasures. He never looked to own the gaudy totems of success. He liked a cigar in the morning. And in the afternoon. He liked a drink, or two, at dusk. He also took joy in the fact that “dusk” lacks precise definition. He had his books, he had his classical music, he had his hard work. He had his family. He was content.

But the one thing that gave him true contentment was his beautiful wife, Frances. At key points in my life, my father counseled that the key to success in life is to marry the right woman. He said it often, he meant it, and he lived and died by it. He married his high school belle, Frances Lynch, after a nine-year courtship marked by rest-stops in a seminary and in Korea. They were no less lovers and friends and companions after fifty-four years of marriage than after their first year. The great poet said: “My crown is in my heart, not in my head; / Nor decked with diamonds and Indian stones; / Nor to be seen: my crown is called content: / A crown that seldom kings enjoy.”<sup>4</sup>

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4. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *THE THIRD PART OF KING HENRY THE SIXTH* act 3, sc. 1.

What is the goal of the life well lived? Contentment. Joe McLaughlin wore many crowns, but the one that fit him best was his contentment. The wellspring of his joy and contentment is with us tonight and she is sitting in the first row.

You have all been patient. Thank you once again for being here on a cold February night to pause and render tribute to Joe McLaughlin. It is a night that grows old. And, I do know the peril of standing between a Fordham crowd and an open bar. I can hear my father's reproach: "Matt, you've grown serious, and therefore dull. Let them take a drink."

Thank you to Fordham for this beautiful tribute to your remarkable seventh Dean. My father's journey is over, but the journey of his law school will continue into far distant days. His death does not end his work. His life continues in each of us he has touched, and in the thousands whom he has never encountered, but who are richer because he has lived.